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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to reconcile the notion of a planetary future with shamanism, presenting the theme that any planetary future will be severely diminished unless shamanic experiences and outcomes are considered in the understanding of education. Methodology was based on participant observation conducted at a medicine lodge at Bengal Mountain, Oklahoma. The first part discusses the link between the notion of a planetary future and shamanism as found in the work of Joseph Campbell, who asserted that myth, mystery, experience, and the sacred are the fundamental sources of education. Shamanism serves a pedagogical function "of how to live a human lifetime in any circumstances," and any meaningful myth must operate at the global level. Shamanism is a deliberate experience through which mystery can be accessed. A story from "Black Elk Speaks" is used to demonstrate that education needs to become literate in the shamanic sense--to tell stories that authenticate mystery by viewing the planet and beyond as local and sanctified. (39 references) (LMI)

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MYTH, ALLUSION, AND EDUCATION

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In this paper I attempt to reconcile the notion of a planetary future with what I have observed and experienced as a participant observer in a medicine lodge formed two years ago at Bengal Mountain in Oklahoma.[1] Though on the face of it this might seem like an unusual juxtaposition, the theme of the paper will be that any planetary future will be severely diminished unless consideration of the types of experience and outcome evident in shamanic contexts (such as at Bengal) is carefully woven into our understanding. I suggest that for this to occur we must begin to recognize our current and continuing need for myth as a nexus to mystery, to the sense of awe and wonder and to questions of being from which our thinking has been in flight from earliest times. It is this mystery and such questions which comprise and motivate shamanic experience.

A link between the notion of a planetary future and shamanism is found in the work of Joseph Campbell, and the assertions I am making are embroidered on the convenience of his treatment of them. The link in Campbell is not unproblematic, but his work does regard mythic needs as contemporary and does accord a credibility and respect to the position of the shaman. Myth, mystery, experience, and the sacred are treated by Campbell in a manner which reminds us unequivocally that these are *the* fundamental sources of education. Failing to explore or cater to them within education we proceed haltingly at best; in order to explore or cater to them we must look beyond received alternatives, and where necessary suspend our deeply sedimented analytic conventions to achieve (re)acquaintance with them.

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[1] Thanks to Joseph Dailey and Gay Knutson for their comments on this material. On Bengal, refer to Peter Gray-Whiteley "What the Goddess Knows: The Body and Insinuation of Spirit" paper for the symposium Body Consciousness and the Curriculum: Problems, Paradox, and Promise, Bergamo Conference, University of Dayton, October 1991; also, see my "Fundamental Acquaintance With Fundamental Things" paper, symposium on Education and the Spirit, American Educational Studies Association Annual Conference, Kansas City, October 1991.

Myth

It has seemed important to deny the worthiness of myth as an area of elemental consideration in education. Studies foundational to education have been predicated largely on relegating myth to a dustbin marked 'pre-rational', a term ostensibly sufficient to valorize philosophy, history, science, sociology, psychology and other areas of inquiry because it is not used to describe them. Implicitly, occupation with myth-in-the-world has been superseded in vitality, relevance, and effectiveness by the rational project. Derivative from this foundation, extant approaches to education are similarly presumptuous. For example, in what was at the time offered as the definitive article on the career of philosophy of education, Price's contribution to the 1967 Encyclopedia of Philosophy explicitly asserted that before this career could get under way (in Greece) "any explanatory value" to myth had to be "disallowed".[2] Within education, myth-as-bygone was the dominant perception well before Price wrote, and is in the main where matters rest today. Myth might on occasion be an object of rationally circumscribed study, but would not itself become a current vehicle for study of things.[3]

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2 Kingsley Price *Philosophy of Education, History of* in Paul Edwards (ed) The Encylopedia of Philosophy VI Macmillan 1967 p230.

3 This disposition to myth has also obtained outside education, though with some relief, of which Joseph Campbell's work is an obvious example. But as a result of both his style and insistence on the immediacy of myth Campbell earned an intended dismissal as a dilettante from within much of academe. (Reportedly Campbell actually approved being labelled in this way, a dilettante being on who 'takes delight in'.) Having to explain why Campbell is appropriate to refer to or critique before one does so seems inordinately *de rigueur* in academic circles, even among those relatively sympathetic to Campbell, for example, authors in the recent collection Paths to the Power of Myth: Joseph Campbell and the Study of Religion Daniel C. Noel (ed) Crossroad 1990.

More recently the tone and attempt of work such as Doty's Mythography, influenced as Doty acknowledges by Elizabeth Sewell, represents a softening of the rational landscape. The final contrast is between the poetical and the nonpoetical, and Doty recalls Heidegger's

[fn. conts.]

Enter the rational project, and exit the mystery of experience. One is reminded of Durant's wry comment about Aristotle and the influence of his skewed insistence on logic and reason, a comment which by extension might as well apply to much foundational study in education:

> What shall we say of this philosophy? Perhaps nothing rapturous. It is difficult to be enthusiastic about Aristotle, because it was difficult for him to be enthusiastic about anything.... His motto is *nil admirari*--to admire or marvel at nothing....[4]

Though it was Aristotle who asserted[5] that philosophy begins in wonder, it is a turning away from mystery and marvel which characterizes both his work and the parallel legacy we have chosen to inherit.[6] In doing so we have established a dubious shelter against experience. Wonder-free, human existence (and education) has become an increasingly strange project of controlling experience's generous ambiguities and severely

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"Poetically man dwells on earth" which he transforms to "Mythically and ritually, humans live....". Doty quotes Sewell:

> An author can do three things with myth. He can study its nature and its origins, in its traditional form; interpret myths according to his own theories; or mythologize himself, either by thinking himself into existing myths and using them as instruments for his own thought, or by inventing new myths and using them in the same way. The first activity may be poetical, although it need not be. The third must be poetical. The second is wholly nonpoetic, indeed antipoetical.

Doty concludes that mythopoesis "ultimately constitutes the matrixing mode and activity for any and all our endeavors". Refer to William G. Doty Mythography: The Study of Myths and Rituals University of Alabama Press 1986 pxvii and *passim*, and Elizabeth Sewell The Orphic Voice: Poetry and Natural History Yale University Press 1960 p82.

4 Will Durant The Story of Philosophy Simon and Schuster 1961 p71.

5 Metaphysics A 2, 982b12-13.

6 Interesting echoes of over-insistence on reasoning and on classifying and prescribing responses to the world can be found in much of the current and ubiquitous critical thinking movement, where intellectual energy and passion--it is a movement after all--combine for the purpose of telling others how to think. Elsewhere, informatic and computer-assisted instructional packages in schools in-build an emphatic logico-mathematical epistemological preference.

taming those who venture too near the nonrational edge.[7] Marvels result now from manufacture, for which we pay a continuing high price, much of the time--along with the environment--literally being "shattered, tattered, [and] demented" by them.[8] Seemingly, security comes from our willingness at a moment's notice to enforce what must be held in common around 'right' ways to think, act, and be in the world. Symptomatically, why is the study of education so humorless?

For its part, myth seeks to accommodate to the ongoing mystery experience instantiates, rather than recognizing the awesomeness of existence then retreating from it. Myth is allusion to mystery, not mystery at remove but here and now, the constant of experience which can never be overcome.[9] Consequently the mythic project is never complete,[10] and *a priori* resists sufficient description.

Campbell[11]

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7 To a point where any distinctions between the nonrational and irrational have become increasingly blurred.

8 R.D. Laing The Bird of Paradise Penguin 1974 p150. How marvellous is it that rockets can be delivered at speed with pin-point accuracy down a chimney to shatter bodies, a year ago the chic show-and-tell image of military techno-victory?

9 On the attempt to relegate mystery to a distance refer to Peter Gray-Whiteley "What the Goddess Knows: The Body and Insinuation of Spirit".

10 In Sewell's and Doty's terms, it must be poetical.

11 The corpus on Campbell is growing but in general its size and vigor has reflected his marginalized academic status [see fn. 3 above]. Segal's introduction to Campbell is succinct and informative. Refer to Robert A. Segal Joseph Campbell: An Introduction, Garland 1987. As well refer to Noel *op. cit.*

Campbell's principal works were published in the period from 1944 through 1989, and include: A Skeleton Key to Finnegan's Wake with Henry Morton Robinson, Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1944; The Hero With a Thousand Faces Pantheon, 1949; the Masks of God series--Primitive Mythology 1959, Oriental Mythology 1962, Occidental Mythology 1964, and Creative Mythology 1968--all by Viking; The Fight of the Wild Gander: Explorations in the Mythological Dimension Viking, 1969; Myths to Live By Viking, 1972; The Mythic Image, assisted by M.J. Abidie, Princeton U. Press, 1974; the Historical Atlas of World Mythology series--The Way of The Animal Powers 1: Mythologies of the Primitive Hunters and Gatherers 1983, The Way of The

[fn. conts.]

This resistance is as evident in Joseph Campbell's work as elsewhere, except the motive with which Campbell addressed myth--as energized and instructive--is appealing because it enables a distinct sense of the intrigues with which myth grapples:

> Myth basically serves four functions. The first is the mystical function....realizing what a wonder the universe is, and what a wonder you are, and experiencing awe before the mystery. Myth opens the world to the dimension of mystery, to the realization of the mystery that underlies all forms.... You are always addressing the transcendent mystery through the conditions of your actual world.
>
> The second is a cosmological dimension...showing you what the shape of the universe is, but showing it in such a way that the mystery again comes through.....
>
> The third function is the sociological one--supporting and validating a certain social order....
>
> But there is a fourth function of myth, and this is the one that I think everyone must try today to relate to--and that is the pedagogical function, of how to live a human lifetime under any circumstances. Myths can teach you that.[12]

From within this perspective Campbell concluded that "the only myth that is going to be worth thinking about in the immediate future is one that is talking about the planet, not the city, not these people, but the planet, and everybody on it". At the same time he asserts that no such mythology will emerge "for a long, long time to come", that things "are changing too fast to

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Animal Powers 2: Mythologies of the Great Hunt 1983, The Way of the Seeded Earth 1: The Sacrifice 1988, The Way of the Seeded Earth 2: Mythologies of the Primitive Planters: The Northern Americas 1989, The Way of the Seeded Earth 3: Mythologies of the Primitive Planters: The Middle and Southern Americas 1989--all by Harper and Row; The Inner Reaches of Outer Space: Metaphor as Myth and as Religion, Harper and Row 1986; An Open Life: Joseph Campbell in Conversation with Michael Toms, sel. and ed. by John M. Maher and Dennie Briggs, Larson 1988; and Joseph Campbell: The Power of Myth with Bill Moyers, ed. Betty Sue Flowers, Doubleday, 1988.

12 Campbell The Power of Myth p31.

become mythologized".[13] Though there is an untidy fit between these two statements, the salient and welcome implication here is that we do indeed still have mythic needs and that these are planetary; mystery as experience and experience as mystery persist. Life is involvement in both.

Within Campbell's own work (and in that of others)[14], the notion of planetary myth usually has been a response to a claimed psycho-religious importance of the Space-Age[15], of the realization that when "you see the earth from the moon, you don't see any divisions there of nations or states", and that this "might be the symbol, really, for the new mythology to come".[16] Perhaps, except that marvel at barriers broken in achieving the photographed earth-image has been momentary at best, quickly overcome as a matter-of-fact and routine consequence of the employment of technology. The symbol is less the earth and more the craft carrying the camera. Campbell avers that the telling image is "this earth, the one oasis in all space, an extraordinary kind of sacred grove, as it were, set apart for the rituals of life; and not simply one part or section of this earth, but the entire globe now a sanctuary, a set-apart Blessed Place".[17]

Daniel Noel agrees, adding just as tellingly about this image that "what is important to note at the outset is simply that despite barriers to predicting what the emergent mythos may be, all the most evocative clues point in the direction of a *planetary* mythic focus, a guiding set of psycho-cultural images *resulting from our new, technologically-assisted line of sight on the earth in space*".[18] Perhaps not; the politics of such

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13 *ibid.* pp31-2.

14 For example, Daniel C. Noel Approaching Earth: A Search for the Mythic Significance of the Space Age Amity House, 1986.

15 Daniel C. Noel "Harney Peak is Everywhere: The Place of Myth in a Planetary Future" in Noel (ed) *op. cit.* p118

16 Campbell The Power of Myth p32.

17 Campbell "The Moon Walk--the Outward Journey" in Myths To Live By p241.

[fn. conts.]

technology and the vision it brings are desacralizing rather than threads into the sacred.[19] Shelter against experience is converted into a fortress.

Far more evocative for the notion of planetary myth is a fundamental premise Campbell invariably relies on throughout his work, that access to mystery was and is available via deliberate experience. Precluded for the follower[20], whether of preferred modes of thinking or of technology, such experience is the province of the shaman, a figure whose presence and activity in the world Campbell greatly admired yet whose modern aspect he ultimately underrates. The shaman differs from the traditional Western mystic less in the direction than in the path taken, which is through immediate, non-elite elements available locally.[21] Typically:

> The shaman is a person, male or female, who has an overwhelming psychological experience that turns him [or her] totally inward. The whole unconscious opens up, and the shaman falls into it. [22]

This is Campbell's simple way of describing the texture of key mystic process, the texture of purposeful entry into "that sense of existence--of spontaneous and willing arising--which is the first and deepest characteristic of being" and in which we all participate, however unwittingly.[23] The shaman journeys intentionally within this sense to discover, grow, and heal. Encountering aspects unavailable outside this journey, the shaman probes and is led beyond the barriers of everyday

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18 Noel "Harney Peak...." p119 (second emphasis added).

19 For an interesting recent exploration of this theme, refer to Jerry Mander In the Absence of the Sacred: The Failure of Technology & the Survival of the Indian Nations Sierra Club, 1991.

20 Campbell The Power of Myth p60.

21 On this, refer to Gray-Whiteley "Fundamental Acquaintance With Fundamental Things".

22 Campbell The Power of Myth p86.

23 Campbell Flight of the Wild Gander p188. On this process emphasized as phenomenological rather than psychological refer to Peter Gray-Whiteley "Fundamental Acquaintance With Fundamental Things".

consciousness, and then returns. At times arduous, exhausting, fraught with the unexpected and requiring much courage, this undertaking enables an enhanced vision of being, for both shaman and the community. The outcome and reward of the process the shaman may convey symbolically, except that symbols can never truly render the experience, instead "they suggest it".[24] The experience undertaken is the shaman's teacher; language or symbolic activity the shaman shares subsequent to it--his or her teaching--is limited to establishing guides toward what was involved. As the repository of these guides, myth involves the imagination in glimpsing the mystery suggested within such experience.

For Campbell the time of the shaman *qua* shaman has passed; it is currently "the function of the artist" to communicate myths, poetically to evoke the transcendence "inherent in nature".[25] Now while the artist may do so, it is not the case that the shamanic tradition has passed away or has necessarily degenerated to the 'magician' status Campbell also suggests.[26] Among indigenous peoples and in pockets of non-indigenous activity world-wide this tradition persists, often deeply submerged for the sake of survival. Its concern is the "evocation of a sense of the absolutely unknowable"[27] which floods experience, a sense which it nevertheless grounds in the myth emerging from it. As for Campbell's perspective, Richard Underwood offers a useful comment:

> Martin Heidegger has argued that Plato's "turn" from the concern for Being in the pre-Socratic philosophers was the beginning of a 2500-year detour, a history of the metaphysical forgetting of Being. Similarly, one might say, the mandalic structure originating with the

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24 Campbell The Power of Myth p61.

25 Campbell The Power of Myth p99.

26 *ibid.* p100. Not unrelated, Campbell demonstrates a marked and errant disposition to speak of Native American/Indian peoples as though they and their powerful mystic traditions *were* rather than *are*.

27 Campbell The Flight of the Wild Gander p188.

> "turn" from hunting to agriculture, with its corresponding hierarchies in architecture, city planning, temples, cathedrals, dogmas, and organizations of priestly personnel, was the beginning of another detour, beginning a history of the forgetting of the sacred.... However....in wondering if the historical-psychological-spiritual function of the once-sacred mandala has outlived its "usefulness", Campbell is posing the possibility of the individual now becoming his or her own shaman-artist, following the creative way through the mandalic form to a renewed experience of the mystery of Being.[28]

Though this narrows the working sense of the shamanic, both Campbell and this reading of him nevertheless remind us that to turn toward experience takes us down this path, with the prospect of release from bondage[29] to stultifying forms of cosmology, sociology, and pedagogy which presently determine us.

The clue that this disposition to the world is of value and can contribute to the planetary future rests predominantly in Campbell's other reminder that what we seek is not a meaning for life, but "an experience of being alive, so that our life experiences on the purely physical plane will have resonances within our innermost being and reality, so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive".[30] Abjuring experience, can we live or do we just survive?[31]

Education

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28 Richard A. Underwood "Living by Myth: Joseph Campbell, C.G. Jung, and the Religious Life-Journey" in Noel (ed) *op. cit.* p24.

29 *ibid.* p25

30 Campbell The Power of Myth p5

31 Note Chief Seattle's words, quoted by Campbell (The Power of Myth p34):

> What will happen when the buffalo are all slaughtered? The wild horses tamed? What will happen when the secret corners of the forest are heavy with the scent of many men and the view of the ripe hills is blotted by talking wires? Where will the thicket be? Gone! And what is it to say goodbye to the swift pony and the hunt? The end of living and the beginning of survival.[1852]

To date we have attempted in any number of ways to own certainty within interrelated philosophical and ideological boundaries. What we have yet to come to terms with is the incessant ambiguities experience affords as our proper curriculum. Carving these up as rigidifying questions of knowledge, reality, and value or as the substance only of economic, social, and political dispositions is folly:

> What is required of us all, spiritually as well as corporeally, is much more the fearless self-sufficiency of our shamanistic inheritance than the timorous piety of the priest-guided Neolithic. Those of us who never dared to be titans but only obedient children, following as loyally as possible the commands of Zeus, or Yahweh, or the State, now find that the commands themselves are in a somewhat fluent condition, changing with the time. For the circle has been broken--the mandala of truth. [32]

Day to day in the schools we are in shock because this fearlessness is what we cannot achieve, except in vague and partial ways. We are in a quandary, the double-bind of attempting to lead human beings into a diminishing future without upsetting a souring and evaporating status quo. We no longer tell children and each other stories out of experience, stories of simultaneously ecstatic and terrifying encounters within our shared *mysterium tremendum*. Instead we reach to offer them carefully reduced fragments from within our own fragmentation. We have respected Plato's admonition against narrative[33] too much.

It is in a shamanic sense that we need to become literate. Especially those of us outside of or unfamiliar with any such tradition need to begin to shape and offer stories and songs of our own experience in being, stories and songs which result from journeys through which we see ourselves again as mysterious. An example Campbell frequently returned to, that

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32 Campbell The Flight of the Wild Gander p189.

33 Plato Republic II 378 and *passim*.

of Black Elk[34], is replicable *mutatis mutandis* in each life as a path to self-, social and cosmological discovery. When Black Elk was around nine years old:

> The boy became sick, psychologically sick. His family tells the typical shaman story. The child begins to tremble and is immobilized. The family is terribly concerned about it, and they send for a shaman who has had the experience in his own youth, to come....and pull the youngster out of it. But instead of relieving the boy of the deities, the shaman is adapting him to the deities and the deities to himself.... Here, the deities who have been encountered--powers, let's call them--are retained. The connection is maintained, not broken. And these men then become the spiritual advisers and gift givers to their people.
> Well, what happened with this young boy was that he had a prophetic vision....[T]he vision was an experience of himself as going through the realms of spiritual imagery that were of his culture and assimilating their import. It comes to one great statement, which for me is a key statement to the understanding of myth and symbols. He says, "I saw myself on the central mountain of the world, the highest place, and I had a vision because I was seeing in the sacred manner of the world." And the sacred central mountain was Harney Peak in South Dakota. And then he says, "But the central mountain is everywhere."
> That is a real mythological realization. It distinguishes between the local....and its connotation as the center of the world. The center of the world is the *axis mundi*, the central point, the pole around which all revolves. The central point of the world is where stillness and movement are together. Movement is time, but stillness is eternity. Realizing how this moment of your life is actually a moment of eternity, and experiencing the eternal aspect of what you're doing in the temporal experience--this is the mythological experience. [35]

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34 e.g., The Power of Myth pp88-9. Refer *inter alia* to Black Elk Speaks as told through John G. Neihardt U. of Nebraska Press, 1979 (originally published 1932); see also John (Fire) Lame Deer and Richard Erdoes Lame Deer Seeker of Visions Washington Square Press, 1972.

35 Campbell The Power of Myth pp88-9.

Admitting the eternal into the finite, Black Elk's story and others like it offer a means to enable rather than destroy or to continue to subvert the planetary future. We must become relentless tellers of such stories and relentless listeners to such stories, each of us comparably locating mystery in ourselves through "the blood and bone of narrative".[36] In this manner we can begin to embrace life rather than survival, be in life whose mystery is its "holiness and everyday humdrum, sadness and laughter, the mind and the belly all mixed together".[37] If "sanctification of the local landscape" is fundamental to mythology[38], then the next mythic step is the planet-and-beyond as local and sanctified through the story which authenticates mystery. Failing this, we continue to be doomed.

Having reached the point where we have literally become care-less about the sacred, we may find we are far from equipped to re-encounter it. The journey can be daunting and can involve "many dangers" even for the adept.[39] Experience-stories honestly told alert us to this, to the likely presence within the attempt of what is puzzling and obscure and threatening, as well as the presence of what is immediately benevolent and crystal clear. But until we begin this process we remain in the Platonic cave--the shelter of last resort--whose architecture prompts a philosophical elite to believe that the light outside, the goal, is a more flamboyant example of what causes the dim reflections misguiding us now. Agitating to find and to teach others to find this philosophical light-not-known, we distract ourselves from the silence through which what

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36 Linda Sexson "Let Talking Snakes Lie: Sacrificing Stories" in Noel (ed) *op. cit.* p137.

37 Leonard Crow Dog in Joan Halifax Shamanic Voices: A Survey of Visionary Narratives E.P. Dutton, 1979, p77.

38 Campbell The Power of Myth p91.

39 Campbell The Power of Myth p121.

surrounds us can teach us. What we structure as a cave to fight out of may instead be a gate to pass through.